

## **Claims**

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:  
  
determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement;  
  
responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content during an advertisement, generating a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content; and  
  
inserting the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more users from an interactive television service provider via a network with which the one or more users and the interactive television service provider are connected.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement is based on information supplied by a content provider.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the content provider has paid the interactive television service provider to generate and transmit the hot key.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement is based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more users of the interactive television service have paid the interactive television service provider to receive the hot key signal.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more users of the interactive television service have not paid the interactive television service provider to be excluded from receiving the hot key signal.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
9. A method comprising:  
determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide;  
responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content via an electronic program guide, generating a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content; and

inserting the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more users from an interactive television service provider via a network with which the one or more users and the interactive television service provider are connected.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide is based on information supplied by a content provider.
11. The method of claim 9, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide is based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.
12. The method of claim 9, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
13. The method of claim 9, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
14. A method comprising:

receiving a hot key signal related to an advertisement and indicating availability  
and a location of alternate content;  
determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of an interactive  
television (TV) provider currently viewing the advertisement;  
responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, displaying on  
a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received; and  
responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, redirecting the  
user to the alternate content.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location for the alternate content.
16. The method of claim 14, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user comprises determining whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.
17. The method of claim 16, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user further comprises determining whether the alternate content is related to content currently being viewed by the user.
18. A method comprising:

receiving a hot key signal from an interactive television service provider's network, the hot key signal related to an electronic program guide, indicating availability and a location of alternate content and containing information providing details regarding the alternate content; determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of the interactive television service provider; and responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, displaying on a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising displaying to the user the information providing details regarding the alternate content.
20. The method of claim 18, further comprising responsive to the user requesting additional information, displaying to the user the information providing details regarding the alternate content.
21. The method of claim 18, further comprising responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, displaying the alternate content to the user.
22. The method of claim 18, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating the location of the alternate content.

23. A system comprising:
- a content reception, distribution, and switching portion connected with one or more content providers to receive and redistribute interactive television (TV) content;
  - a head-end transport portion connected with the content reception, distribution, and switching portion to and encode, multiplex and transmit content signals from the content reception, distribution, and switching portion over a network;
  - a hot key generation portion to determine whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement, responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content during an advertisement, and generate a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content.
24. The system of claim 23, wherein the head-end transport portion receives the hot key signal from the hot key generation portion, and multiplexes the hot key signal with the content signal.
25. The system of claim 23, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement based on information supplied by a content provider.

26. The system of claim 23, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.
27. The system of claim 23, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
28. The system of claim 23, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
29. A system comprising:  
a content reception, distribution, and switching portion connected with one or more content providers to receive and redistribute interactive television (TV) content;  
a head-end transport portion connected with the content reception, distribution, and switching portion to and encode, multiplex and transmit content signals from the content reception, distribution, and switching portion over a network;  
a hot key generation portion determine whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic

program guide, responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content via an electronic program guide, and generate a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein the head-end transport portion receives the hot key signal from the hot key generation portion, and multiplexes the hot key signal with the content signal.
31. The system of claim 29, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide based on information supplied by a content provider.
32. The system of claim 29, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.
33. The system of claim 29, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.



34. The system of claim 29, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
35. A system comprising:  
a tuner, receiver, and demodulator portion and a demultiplexor portion to receive  
a hot key signal related to an advertisement and indicating availability and  
a location of alternate content;  
a processor to determine whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of an  
interactive television (TV) provider currently viewing the advertisement,  
responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, display  
on a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received, and  
responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, redirect  
the user to the alternate content.
36. The system of claim 35, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location for the alternate content.
37. The system of claim 35, wherein the processor determines whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user based on whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.

38. The system of claim 37, wherein the processor determines whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user based on whether the alternate content is related to content currently being viewed by the user.
39. A system comprising:  
a tuner, receiver, and demodulator portion and a demultiplexor portion to receive  
a hot key signal from an interactive television service provider's network,  
the hot key signal related to an electronic program guide, indicating  
availability and a location of alternate content and containing information  
providing details regarding the alternate content; and  
a processor to determine whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of the  
interactive television service provider, and responsive to determining the  
hot key signal is relevant to the user, display on a screen an indication that  
the hot key signal has been received.
40. The system of claim 39, wherein the processor displays to the user the  
information providing details regarding the alternate content.
41. The system of claim 39, wherein the processor, responsive to the user requesting  
additional information, displays to the user the information providing details  
regarding the alternate content.

42. The system of claim 39, wherein the processor, responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, displays the alternate content to the user.
43. The system of claim 39, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating the location of the alternate content.
44. A machine readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instruction, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:  
determine whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement;  
responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content during an advertisement, generate a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content; and  
insert the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more users from an interactive television service provider via a network with which the one or more users and the interactive television service provider are connected.
45. The machine readable medium of claim 44, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement is based on information supplied by a content provider.

46. The machine readable medium of claim 44, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content during an advertisement is based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.
47. The machine readable medium of claim 44, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
48. The machine-readable medium of claim 44, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
49. A machine readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instruction, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:  
determine whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide;  
responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content via an electronic program guide, generate a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content; and  
insert the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more users from an interactive television service provider via a network with which

the one or more users and the interactive television service provider are connected.

50. The machine readable medium of claim 49, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide is based on information supplied by a content provider.
51. The machine readable medium of claim 49, wherein determining whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content via an electronic program guide is based on information generated by the interactive television service provider.
52. The machine readable medium of claim 49, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
53. The machine-readable medium of claim 49, wherein the available content is related to content currently being viewed by the one or more users.
54. A machine readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instruction, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

receive a hot key signal related to an advertisement and indicating availability and  
a location of alternate content;  
determine whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of an interactive  
television (TV) provider currently viewing the advertisement;  
responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, display on a  
screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received; and  
responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, redirect the user  
to the alternate content.

55. The machine readable medium of claim 54, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location for the alternate content.
56. The machine-readable medium of claim 54, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user comprises determining whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.
57. The machine readable medium of claim 54, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user further comprises determining whether the alternate content is related to content currently being viewed by the user.

58. A machine readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instruction, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:
- receive a hot key signal from an interactive television service provider's network,
- the hot key signal related to an electronic program guide, indicating availability and a location of alternate content and containing information providing details regarding the alternate content;
- determine whether the hot key signal is relevant to a user of the interactive television service provider; and
- responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, display on a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received.
59. The machine readable medium of claim 58, further comprising displaying to the user the information providing details regarding the alternate content.
60. The machine readable medium of claim 58, further comprising responsive to the user requesting additional information, displaying to the user the information providing details regarding the alternate content.
61. The machine-readable medium of claim 58, further comprising responsive to receiving an indication that the hot key is accepted, displaying the alternate content to the user.

62. The machine readable medium of claim 58, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating the location of the alternate content.